



CENTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY  
**CHILD WELFARE PERMANENCY REFORMS**

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## Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning:

### *Early Search for Relatives and/or Absent Parents, and Resolution of Paternity*

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This series of brief publications, *Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning*, provides descriptions of select practices identified through preliminary analysis of data from the study: **Child Welfare Permanency Reforms**. This study examines the implementation of concurrent planning in 6 California counties through focus groups and interviews with a variety of stakeholders in concurrent planning cases (i.e., social workers, supervisors, and child welfare managers; attorneys and judges; and foster parents and birth parents). Promising Practices from several non-study counties and agencies with well-developed concurrent planning approaches have also been examined. The practice approach described below represents work conducted in one or more of the following county child welfare agencies: Contra Costa, Mendocino, Monterey, Placer, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, and Yolo counties, as well as the Foster Family Agency, Sierra Adoptions. Although none of these Promising Practices have been empirically examined in terms of their impact on child and family outcomes, each of those highlighted appears to reflect and support efforts to implement concurrent planning.

**Promising Practice:** *A formal search for relatives and absent parents, including resolution of paternity issues and compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirements, takes place early in every case.*

Study participants in many counties indicated that a search for appropriate relative placements is a key aspect of concurrent planning and should occur as early as possible in each case. In one county, a specialized Search Unit conducts much of the preliminary work necessary for a concurrent placement to occur. Agency procedures ensure that all cases are screened through this special unit, thus increasing the likelihood that when appropriate, concurrent placements can be identified and secured for children as early as possible.

- The Search Unit workers conduct the time-intensive process of searching for and noticing all relevant parties, and ensure that paternity issues have been resolved, ICWA requirements have been addressed, and potential relative placements have been thoroughly studied prior to a child entering a non-kin concurrent placement. Documentation of such a referral is required for all cases scheduled for a California W & I Code 366.26 hearing.
- The Search Unit also screens for the presence of siblings in a case, so that placement of siblings together can be explored.
- Cases are required to be referred at the 6-, 12-, and 18-month review points. The Search Unit assesses the parents' status in their reunification efforts and whether the worker plans to continue services for the parent.
- If the Search Unit screens for relatives and determines that a non-kin concurrent placement would be appropriate, the unit obtains background information on the child, develops a written summary about the child and the legal risks in the case, and discusses permanency options with the current foster caregiver. The information is then passed on to a follow-up placement review committee, which selects the most appropriate permanent placement for the child.

According to workers and supervisors interviewed, early and thorough identification of parents and relatives and exploration of their appropriateness for placement can potentially prevent problems from arising later in a case. For example, this information not only increases possible placement options but also lowers the chance that an unknown relative might be identified late in the case and potentially disrupt an existing non-relative placement. This provides concurrent placement families with important information about case characteristics, and protects these placements from one potential source of disruption. In addition, child welfare workers in more than one county suggested that the task of researching paternity and relatives is a significant one, and that assignment of these tasks to a specialized unit may be an efficient use of resources. Finally, more than one interviewee suggested that the judiciary could play an additional role with respect to relatives, with Judges reiterating, in court, the need for parents to identify potential relative placements.